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שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 21 September 2012 - 5 Tishrei 5773
Sedra Vayelech and Yom Kippur

THE ESSENCE OF THE JEW

A WELL KNOWN PHENOMENON AT THIS TIME, OF YEAR IS THE WAY PEOPLE flock to the Synagogues for the High Holy Days, and most especially for Yom Kippur, which begins on Tuesday night (26 September). Synagogues which are usually half empty will be packed to overflowing. What is happening? A mass yearning for repentance?

Repentance is clearly the theme of this period of the calendar. The Sedra¹ includes a warning from G-d to the Jewish people about the danger of transgression. The Haftorah is a passage from the Prophet Hosea (ch.14) asking the Jewish people to return to G-d, because they have erred and transgressed. This is always read on the Shabbat before Yom Kippur.

For some people, 'Repentance' is genuinely what Yom Kippur is all about. Feeling regret about sins, whether accidental or deliberate. Asking their friends and acquaintances to forgive them, if they have offended them during the year. Listening intently to the Sedra and the Haftorah, and thinking this is indeed their story. On Yom Kippur, such people pray earnestly, especially when it comes to the frequently repeated list of sins. And at the end of the day, at the conclusion of the last part of the prayers, called Ne'ilah, when the sacred Ark with the



Dedicated by Dr Jutta Singer תחיל' in Memory of her mother
Leah bas Freidel ע"ה - Erev Yom Kippur 5721 (1960)

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Torah Scrolls is open for the whole service, they have a wonderful sense of being spiritually purified and cleansed.

Well, that is what some people experience. For others things are a little different. One goes to the Synagogue on Yom Kippur. There is indeed a special atmosphere. There are friends who have also come on this important day. One prays a bit. Everyone is very conscious of fasting. Then at the end of the service, when hurrying home to eat, one's heart feels light, there is an almost tangible sense of being spiritually purified and cleansed.

What was that? Purified and cleansed? How did that happen? Don't you have to pray a lot more, and not chat with your friends?

A discussion by the Lubavitcher Rebbe helps us understand this. The Sages of the Talmud debate the question of whether or not Yom Kippur is spiritually effective for someone who fasts but does not bother to repent. According to the great Rabbi Judah the Prince, it is still effective in achieving atonement for the person².

The Rebbe explains that there are different levels in the connection of the Jew with G-d. One level is the bond achieved by properly keeping the Commandments. This is a fine, pious person. Then comes a yet deeper level. This is achieved through repentance. In the process of repentance, the individual reaches a deeper dimension of his or her soul. And then there is a third level, which is even more profound.

This is a bond with G-d which is effective even if the person does not think about it, relating to the very essence of the soul. The Rebbe explains that, according to Rabbi Judah the Prince, this level of the person's soul is revealed on Yom Kippur, just by fasting and keeping the rules of the festival. It is most obvious at the conclusion of the service, Ne'ilah, meaning "closing", or "locking", when the Jew and G-d are locked together. Of course, Yom Kippur becomes more meaningful if one prays and does not chat. But this deepest level of the soul is revealed for everyone. It is the deepest element of Jewish identity, and it is also the key to Redemption³.

See you in the Synagogue!

1. Deuteronomy ch.31, see verses 16-18.. 2. Talmud, Shavuot 13a. Except in the case of certain transgressions. 3 Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot* vol.4 p 1149 ff.

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SEDRA VAYELECH - SHABBAT OF RETURN

RETURNING...

“This Shabbat is called the Shabbat of Return. One reason for this is because the Haftorah begins with the word ‘Return... !’ Another reason is because on this Shabbat, shortly before Yom Kippur people are thinking about coming back, returning.”

Debra’s teacher, Mr Bernstein, droned on and on, all about returning, going back. Debra could not actually understand what he was talking about. “Go back to where?” she thought. I have always been here...”

“Debra! Are you listening?” asked Mr Bernstein.

“Er, not really,” said Debra, truthfully. “I was actually wondering – er, where do we have to go back to. I mean, what do you mean ‘Return...’”

There were some giggles in the class. Debra went red. She began wondering if Mr Bernstein would get angry and phone up her parents, as he did when she had brought a goldfish to Hebrew Classes in a jam jar and the whole thing had spilt in her desk.

However, for once Mr Bernstein seemed to be smiling at her. He did not look angry at all.

“That is an excellent question!” he said loudly to the

whole class. "Who can give an answer? Where are we trying to go when we *Return*?"

"To the Land of Israel?", suggested Michal. She was an Israeli girl who was staying in England for a year because of her father's job and kept talking about going back home to Tel Aviv.

"Very good! That is exactly where we all want to return - with the coming of Mashiach", said Mr Bernstein. "Then the whole Jewish people will return and the Temple will be rebuilt. But what do we have to do now in order to achieve that?"

Suddenly, Debra herself saw the answer. You know how an answer seems to pop into your head from nowhere? That's what happened.

"We have to return to G-d!" she said. "Through keeping His Commandments! If we don't keep them, it's as if we are going *away* from G-d. Then when we start keeping them again, it's as if we are *coming back*!"

Debra thought she heard a gasp from someone at the back of the class. Since when does Debra Levy come out with stuff like that?

"Excellent!" said Mr Bernstein, feeling a pang of regret regarding his part in the recent incident with the goldfish. After all, it wasn't Debra's fault the jar had spilt.

"And then," Debra continued, feeling very bold and inspired, "when we return to G-d, He will bring us back to our Holy Land, and rebuild the Temple for us".

"Quite right, Debra," said Mr Bemstein. "That is what the Shabbat of Return is all about..."

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